

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

The action by the Examiner of this application, together with the cited references, has been given careful consideration. Following such consideration, claims 1-2, 4-5, and 7-13 have been amended to define more clearly the patentable invention applicant believes is disclosed herein. Moreover, claims 3 and 6 have been cancelled. It is respectfully requested that the Examiner reconsider the claims in their present form, together with the following comments, and allow the application.

The Examiner has rejected claim 9 under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention. Claim 9 has now been amended to depend from claim 7, rather than claim 1. Accordingly, it is respectfully requested that the Examiner now withdraw the 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph rejection.

The Examiner has rejected claims 1-12 under 35 U.S.C. 102(b), as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,288,467 to Biermaier. In addition, claims 1-4 and 6-8 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,457,897 to Becker. The Examiner has also rejected claim 13 as being obvious in view of Biermaier and U.S. Patent Publication No. 2003/0036272 to Shamouilian et al. It is respectfully submitted that none of the cited references, taken individually or in combination, teaches or suggests the applicant's invention as set forth in the present claims.

The present invention is directed to a washer having a pressure equalization system. The pressure equalization system equalizes pressure inside a washing chamber due to fluctuations in the pressure inside the washing chamber during operation of the washer. In this regard, considerable differences in temperature in liquids and gasses introduced into the washing chamber during operation of the washer can produce either an increased pressure in the washing chamber as compared to the surrounding environment, or a vacuum in the washing chamber as compared to the surrounding environment. Accordingly, the present invention includes a plurality of gate elements that are movable between an open position and a closed position. Operation of these gate elements equalizes the pressure within the washing chamber.

Referring to claim 1, this claim now defines a *washer* that is comprised of a washing chamber, an intake assembly having a first blower and a first chamber, and a pressure equalization system operable to maintain an equalized pressure in the washing chamber. The pressure equalization system includes a first gate element, and a second gate element. The first gate element controls fluid flow between the first chamber and the washing chamber, while the second gate element controls airflow into the first chamber from the environment surrounding the washer. As set forth in claim 1, “said first gate element and said second gate element move to the open position *in response to a negative pressure condition* in said washing chamber to increase the pressure therein.”

The Examiner has equated Biermaier’s magnetic valves 6, 10, and 12 with the claimed gate elements. It is respectfully submitted that magnetic valves 6, 10, and 12 do not move to an open position in response to a negative pressure condition in a washing chamber to increase the pressure therein, as required by independent claim 1.

The operation of each magnetic valves 6, 10, and 12 will now be summarized with reference to FIG. 1. Magnetic valve 6 is opened to supply liquid to a feed line 2. Feed line 2 is connected with a non-return valve 26. Non-return valve 26 controls fluid flow into a vessel 15 containing articles that are to be cleaned.

Magnetic valve 10 controls air flow to an air supply line 4. Air supply line 4 is fluidly connected with a non-return valve 27. Non-return valve 27 controls fluid flow into vessel 15.

Magnetic valve 12 is used to control air flow into feed line 2, as shown in FIG. 1 and described at column 3, lines 10-17. This air flow to feed line 2 allows residual water to be “blown out” after a cleaning process.

Magnetic valves 6, 10, and 12 appear to be operated by signals transmitted by a control unit, and do not “move to the open position in response to a negative pressure condition in said washing chamber to increase the pressure therein” as required by claim 1. In this regard, magnetic valves 6, 10, and 12 are not used for pressure control within vessel 15 or washing space 1, but rather are used to control the flow of specific fluids (i.e., pressurized air and/or cleaning and disinfecting liquids) into vessel 15. None of the magnetic valves 6, 10, or 12 responds to a negative pressure condition inside the vessel 15 or washing space 1.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 is patentable over Biermaier.

With respect to Becker, the Examiner argues that Becker discloses an apparatus capable of washing, and that since the term “washer” is in the preamble of the claim it “is considered intended use and afforded little patentable weight since the body of the claim does not claim any washer parts.” As a result, the Examiner concludes that the applicant’s claimed invention reads on any apparatus having a chamber that is capable of functioning as a washing means.

Amended claim 1 now explicitly defines a washer comprising “a washing chamber dimensioned to receive articles to be washed.” The “washing chamber” is now recited in the body of the claim. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that the claimed invention does not read on *any apparatus* having a chamber that is capable of functioning as a washing means.

The operation of Becker will now be summarized with reference to FIG. 1. Becker discloses an apparatus and process for drying a gas stream having a periodically fluctuating moisture content. Plastic granules 2 are dried inside a drying hopper 1. Moisture-laden exit air from drying hopper 1 is conducted through an exit air line 8 to a drying air dryer 10. Moisture is extracted from the exit air in drying air dryer 10. The exit air traveling through line 8 is conveyed to drying air dryer 10 via a first solid filter 12, a flap valve 14 and an intake line 16 of a fan 18. The outlet of fan 18 leads to a chamber 22 of a drying vessel 24. Inside drying vessel 24 moist exit air flows radially through an absorption agent 26. Absorption agent 26 extracts moisture from the exit air. The dried air flows from absorption agent 26 into a central duct 28, and then passes through a flap valve 29 into an outlet line 30 of the drying air dryer 10. Outlet line 30 leads into a chamber 32 that is completely filled with a moisture absorption medium from chamber 32. A line 34 extends from chamber 32 to a heater 7. A drying line 5 extends from chamber 32 into drying hopper 7 to return air thereto. Outside drying vessel 24, a central duct 28 has a branch line 40. An additional flap valve 42 and filter 44 are arranged in branch line 40. Ambient atmosphere enters branch line 40 through filter 44. An intake line 16 is connected with a branch line 50 that is provided with a flap valve 48. Branch line 50 communicates with the ambient atmosphere when flap valve 48 is opened.

During an absorption phase, drying air dryer 10, flap valves 42 and 48 are closed, while flap valves 14 and 29 are opened, thereby creating an air circuit through lines 8, 16, 20, 22, 28, 30, 34, and 5. When the absorption agent 26 is saturated with moisture, a control device (not shown) changes all flap valves and reverses the direction of a fan 18 so that outside air is drawn in through filter 44 and flap valve 42. The outside air is heated by a heating device 46. Hot regeneration air flows radially outwardly from central duct 28 through an absorption agent 26 to an annular chamber 22, and is discharged by fan 18 through lines 20, 16, and 50 and open flap valve 48 to the atmosphere. When the regeneration of absorption agent 26 is completed, the flap valves are switched, fan 18 is reversed and heater 46 is turned off.

The Examiner has equated flap valves 14, 29, 42, and 48 with the claimed gate elements. It is respectfully submitted that none of the flap valves 14, 29, 42, and 48 move to an open position *in response to a negative pressure condition* in a washing chamber to increase the pressure therein. Instead, flap valves 14, 29, 42, and 48 are operated by control signals transmitted by a control device, and are opened and closed in accordance with particular operating modes of Becker's device.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that claim 1 is patentable over Becker.

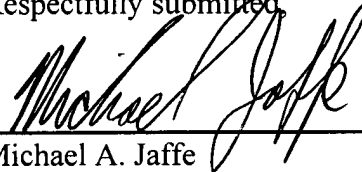
The remaining claims (i.e., dependent claims 2, 4, 5, and 7-13) depend from independent claim 1. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that these dependent claims are patentable over the cited references for at least the reasons set forth above in connection with claim 1.

The cited references made of record and not relied upon have also been reviewed. It is respectfully submitted that none of these additional references teaches or suggests the applicant's invention as defined by the present claims.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is now in proper condition for allowance. If the Examiner believes there are any further matters that need to be discussed in order to expedite the prosecution of the present application, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned.

If there are any fees necessitated by the foregoing communication, please charge such fees to our Deposit Account No. 50-0537, referencing our Docket No. ST8618US.

Respectfully submitted



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Date: January 26, 2006

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Date: January 26, 2006


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